

"Desire in woman thus appears as envy—perhaps only as envy." —Jessica Benjamin, *Bonds of Love*

"I got a dick for a brain and my brain is gonna sell my ass to you." —Greg Dulli, "Gentleman"

It's not like I even wanted to go.

In fact, I wanted nothing more than to haul my sorry ass into bed with a bunch of novels, the remainder of my student essays, and a glass of red wine. The closest I was going to get to charisma this Friday night, I thought to myself, would be a self-administered pedicure, courtesy of Revlon Streetwear. But with some needling on the part of two of my best twentysomething guy friends, I agreed to go to see the Afghan Whigs. The concert has had me obsessed for months, pondering the ways in which an application of metallic nail

impulses out in an Other, taking pleasure in his dominant personality even if, and sometimes especially when, he is dominating us. Wary of our own contentious desires, Benjamin argues, we work out our ambivalence through the dance of domination and submission, as "if woman has no desire of her own [and] must rely on that of a man, with potentially disastrous consequences for her psychic life." Though Benjamin believes that such a situation is neither natural nor irreversible, her work points to the tenacity of cultural myths of femininity as passive and masculinity as active. Such myths are endemic and do not need to be elaborated upon here—suffice it to say that the freedom of masculine privilege on the street and on the stage makes a girl's dreams, when embodied by a boy rock star, doubly difficult.

I've had a hard time trying to describe Dulli and why,

STARFUCKER BLUES

BY JENNIFER MAHER

ILLUSTRATION BY ISABEL SAMARA

polish is not a roar but a whimper for star power, by any gleams necessary.

Almost as soon as we got there—late, and after ordering an amaretto sour for my "free" \$10 drink from a cranky guy with stringy, shoe polish-black hair (why, boys, why?)—I found myself mesmerized and horrified, attracted and repulsed. Greg Dulli, Afghan Whigs frontman, is a pig, I thought. Greg Dulli is a pig, and I would do anything he asked.

An out-of-the-closet feminist since I was 13 and got rejected by the boy I loved because I accidentally scratched his eye when he grabbed my ass too hard during my first slow dance, I worry that adoration for a (male) rock star is as ideologically flimsy as a *Vogue* perfume insert. Isn't it as masochistic as all conventional heterosexual fantasies at this stage in the patriarchy pageant? Don't female fans of male rock stars epitomize the nasty ways in which we "derive pleasure from domination"? Such pleasure, Jessica Benjamin argues in *Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*, is based on what I'll call badness-by-association. Since women are socialized to disavow their own aggressive and dominant impulses in order to become an appropriate sexual "object," we search those


if given the chance, I would've had to be held back from doing anything possible to get on him. Yeah, yeah, yeah, all his Rock Star God stuff was performance, and most certainly parody at that. Maybe this is just me feeling like I understand his postmodern ass-shaking more than the other girls do, but my reactions to Greg Dulli and the passion (real or fake) of his psychodrama/farce have left me profoundly unnerved.

Certainly times are a-changin' in popular music, with more and more women taking a rock star-like center stage, and the sooner every Girl Scout gets an air-guitar badge, the better off we'll all be. Yet at the same time, the phallic swagger is something that's still difficult to call your own, guitar or no. Even when Courtney Love stage-dives (and I mean the old Courtney, not the one who these days would be lifted above the audience by Milos Forman's best boys), she gets her clothes torn off. At one Hole show I saw her pull the alleged ripper-offer from the audience (a skinny indie kid who didn't know what hit him) and punch him in the face. Though I thought at the time that I was watching the Boston Tea Party of Revolution Grrl-Style Now, the fact remains that—as she screamed into the mike that night—some guy will always be "trying to stick his finger up my ass."



Signature

The freedom to stage-dive, to play with sexuality and fan-worship without getting probed unless you request it, has been available to men like Greg Dulli since before Mick Jagger wore lipstick. But it doesn't operate the same way when the person holding the guitar is female. However, as Courtney's attempt at stage-diving in a half-slip suggests, and as Jessica Benjamin argues, it's not as if we don't want the privilege of sexual allure and full-throttle belligerence that male rock stars experience. Who wouldn't want to be adored by thousands and yet sheltered above them because of the manipulation of your charisma and the agency of the beat? At the same time, who would relish the idea of having her tits groped by anonymous undernourished alt-rock boys? This leaves a frustrating dilemma for the female rock star; she wants sex and power, but that doesn't mean she's "asking for it."



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I'd like to take this a step further and say that the dilemmas of the female rock star are mirrored in the dilemmas of the female rock fan. Our desires for and desires to be like the male rock star are all tangled up because we want so many things at once. We want the same entry into unrestrained sex as he has, and we want to have sex with him. We want to sleep with the performer and we want to be one ourselves, to be both sex objects and performing subjects. We want carnal agency without sexual violence. Hence, the gendered frustration such ambivalence creates gives rise, as Benjamin's work suggests, to the flip side of heterosexual female desire: envy, the green eye-makeup monster at the heart of all vicariously accessed pleasure. While women are traditionally perceived as being primarily envious of other women, I would like to suggest that, at heart, we are most envious of men. And the male rock star, perhaps more perfectly than any other cultural icon, incarnates the letting loose of all our impulses to set things on fire and screw our minions afterward. No surprise, then, that for female rock fans, envy—and by association, desire—go together like "Ruby" and "Tuesday."

Yet the realization of how you might want to be him slightly more than you want to fuck him fades into the background when you're in the presence of one of your favorite performers. As the (old) Courtney tells the (older) groupie extraordinaire Pamela Des Barres in a

1994 piece originally published in *Interview* and reprinted in Evelyn McDonnell and Ann Powers's *Rock She Wrote*, "To me rock 'n' roll is about being sexy, and watching guys that make you want to fuck them." Such a reaction is compelling because of the role reversal going on here, however brief. Women are long used to having their bodies on display at the whim of leering men on buses and at bars; here, finally, it is the man who is the spectacle, and the woman who is "watching" him in the dark "want[ing] to fuck" him. This can be intoxicating because it makes groupiehood seem powerful, if only in your own mind.

In seducing a rock star, you get to enact this power, with a sense of competition borne of envy thrown into the mix to really spice things up. You get to perform yourself and make him fall for you in the same way you fell for him. Let me tell you about the sheer movie-size

pleasure I had once in making the kind of guy who would have ignored me in high school get moonier and moonier after a show. Leaned back up against a jukebox (I couldn't have shot it better if it was a movie), I played him like a fiddle, all red lipstick and deconstructive analysis of rock drumming and its connection to the glamour of masculinity in the movie *Legends of the Fall*. ("Guns! Bears! Fathers! Big sticks! You guys are such drama queens.") In a crappy bar, surrounded by wall-mounted skateboards and overpriced imported beer, I amazed myself with my hilarious, if superficial, working of my first Duran Duran video experience into a discussion of *The Second Sex*. ("One is not born with that hair; one becomes it.") I did indeed feel powerful, in control, and, dare I say it, superior to the object of my affection, suggesting to me that seducing a rock star might have more to do with rivalry than reverence.

Similarly, almost as soon as I arrived at the Afghan Whigs concert, I was mesmerized by Dulli even while I was clearly aware of all the rock star clichés he employed—from talking about the city being played in to donning a fedora and shades halfway through the show. The whole uncool thing should have been a failure, but it wasn't. It was simply the best concert I have ever seen. I was unable to take my eyes off the way he swung a guitar from his hips as if it were wearing stockings and a garter belt. He held my attention with the kind of charisma that makes a girl want to run out-

include with this article the postcards and letters to "prove" it), no matter what, you only get to taste the power, not swallow it and make it your own. After the concert, you have to go to work and deal with people who have no idea all those songs are actually written about you. As the days pass, you find yourself depressed, your everyday world a pale comparison to the drama of that night. Life, you feel, has passed you by like a tour bus. This is about the time you begin making a mix tape and checking your e-mail constantly in a desperate attempt to mimic what you felt just days before: that you can make the world do what you tell it to if only you aren't afraid to order it around. This is exactly what the rock star will be able to feel the following night when he gets to go up in front of a whole new group of people and do it all over again.

For what Greg Dulli as archetypal rock star is selling, in all his alpha-omega swagger, is, simply, the Dick. And the Dick is a powerful thing. As most graduate students know, the Dick practically invented language. And while sleeping with the guy gets you the literal dick, that withers in comparison to its metaphor, the thing a guy like Dulli makes it signify: the intoxicating power of getting strangers to love you for your performance of yourself.

This realization, I hope, is where the real fun starts. My passion for Greg Dulli is inspiring not for its eros, but in its envy. I wanted some of that rock star Dick for myself, and the only thing I can think of to do is write: Dulli in concert is your tool and the boss at once, Dionysus on antidepressants, Janis Joplin with a dildo. He knows Jim Morrison is full of shit but imitates him anyway. He is Bruce Springsteen if Springsteen had grown up in New Orleans and had a wet nurse. He is the nightmare boy of all our dreams.

Now, I don't know about you, but if my keyboard had a strap, it would be hanging mighty low across my hips after writing that. Stardom's where you find it, even in your own reflection in your chipped shiny nail polish. After a brief bout of crying and grumbling, "I'm too big for this town!" while in line at the Gap, I find myself incorporating a Dulli-esque swagger in the morning before classes. I choose the higher-heeled boot when he sings on my stereo, "Get your stroll on, baby," and, "You think I'm scared of girls, well, maybe." Three times last week I made my girl students widen their eyes and study me for lessons in fearlessness. I felt life was a metaphoric wind machine at my back. I just about convinced myself I saw Stevie Nicks lighting candles in the campus career center. I wish—rather than hope—that Greg Dulli might even agree with me that what the best rock stars and rock songs can teach you is the ways in which, to paraphrase ABBA, "anybody could be that guy." He is only the catalyst (but what a catalyst) for your own shimmery self to shine (nail polish or not). Greg Dulli's actual dick, I like to imagine, is exquisite. What I know is that it's ephemeral. But what it symbolizes is something even better: your own. ☼

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WOODSTOCK 99 and the finger-up-the-ass problem

There's a world of difference

between lusting after the guy onstage whose snaky hips and sexy croon leave you thoroughly sweaty and wanting to turn around and share that lust with the stranger standing next to you down by the stage. So what happens when your desire to be close to both the music and the musicians leaves you vulnerable to an assault on more than just your senses? That's the question plaguing female rock fans horrified by the accounts of sexual assault, rape, and harassment that oozed from the aftermath of last summer's Woodstock 99.

If you didn't hear about it soon afterward, you're not alone. *USA Today* didn't run a full-page story on reports of women forced into empty tents and attacked. MTV's weekend-long coverage of the festival spent plenty of on-air minutes talking about the weather but said nothing about the woman in the mosh pit who, during Limp Bizkit's set, was held down and raped by several men while many more around—including a Woodstock crisis worker—did absolutely nothing to help. (The same crisis worker later went on record saying he'd witnessed four other similar gang rapes.) And the nightly news didn't see fit to cover reports of an off-duty prison guard assaulting and sodomizing a 15-year-old girl who had ventured to an off-site convenience store.

Recently, the sexual assaults have been addressed in *Spin* and *Jane*, and at the MTV Music Awards by Beastie Boy Adam Horowitz who, in lieu of an acceptance speech for the band's award, issued a call to action against music industry sexism. Which is great, make no mistake. Still, coverage like this, coming more than two months after the fact, seems too little and way too late. But given that the festival organizers themselves disregarded the initial reports, is it any wonder that